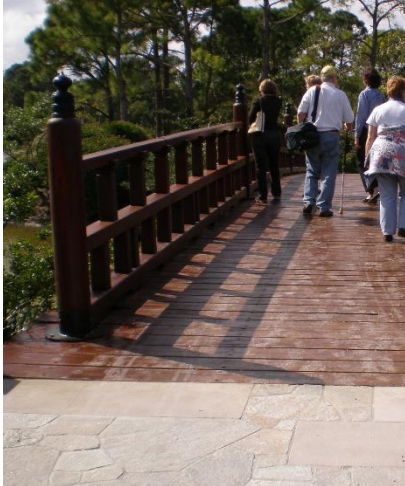


Activity: Nature Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: Mental Health

TH Activity Plan – Public Garden’s Walk for Wellbeing (based on the Morikami Museum and Japanese Garden’s program)

Text by Lesley Fleming, HTR & Susan Morgan, THP

Photo by L. Fleming, Morikami Gardens & N. Santini



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will explore their wellbeing in a multi-session program walking, journaling & reflecting in a public garden setting.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Take action to improve health; use reflective thinking

Physical: Increase physical exercise walking in public garden; increase exposure to sunlight for melatonin production & fresh air

Psychological/Emotional: Explore personal wellbeing reflecting & journaling in response to program questions; reduce feelings of sadness, hopelessness & fear

Sensory: Engage with nature as mechanism prompting self-reflection

Social: Reduce feelings of loneliness; increase feelings of acceptance

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

- | Materials |
|---|
| Guidebook/journal for wellbeing |
| Capacity to host online meetings |
| Optional: map with recommended walking paths, garden membership |
- 1. Pre-Session Preparation:** Prepare guidebook/journal for participant use. [A guide for stroll for wellbeing can be downloaded free of charge.](#) Note that the original funding provided for this type of use. Participants or counselors pre-register for meeting sessions. Optional, identify walking paths with key features (solitude, ease of access, spots to rest, shade, other characteristics per the guide).
 - Facilitator begins multi-session program with the orientation meeting where the program is explained & guidebook/journal is distributed.
 - The guidebook/journal “presents several themed walks that identify points along the way at which to pause, reflect and experience a sense of ease. Walks are based on such themes as awareness, trust, possibility, joy and fulfillment, and are designed to elicit reflections on one’s life. Space in the guidebook/journal allows participants to record their thoughts on these and other topics” (Morikami, 2025).
 - Participants stroll the garden path as a personal activity when they choose using the guidebook/journal prompts. A one-year membership may be provided. Two subsequent scheduled online group meetings (after the initial meeting) provide therapeutic direction/engagement addressing goals/symptoms & outcomes of participants.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: [A program Stroll for Wellbeing](#) was created at the Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens, Florida, in 2006, as a health intervention for seniors with mild dementia. It was intended to provide access to physical exercise, self-reflection, and a self-directed method of alleviating symptoms of depression for elders in a public garden setting (Morikami, 2025). It was based on a research study conducted with Florida Atlantic University’s College of Nursing funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services

recognizing the increasing incidence of depression. Since then, the *Therapeutic Garden Walking Program*, as it is now called, has been used at Morikami Gardens and a similar one - [Strolls for Well-Being at Bloedel Reserve](#) in Washington state. A variety of populations including teachers, essential workers and people experiencing stress, depression, and mental exhaustion have participated. Individuals, as well as counselors with individual clients, support groups, or therapy groups can sign up for the *Therapeutic Garden Walking Program* at the Morikami.

The program was developed by taking a holistic approach to intervention where therapeutic goals in all of the health domains address facets of stress, depression and loneliness. The walking and journaling activities use physical exercise, introspective cognitive skills, psychological reflection, and social interactions in a public garden setting to work towards healthier functioning. The Morikami Gardens was deemed an effective setting where [connections to nature and a calm serene setting](#) could enhance health improvements as noted by the garden's master designer Hoichi Kurisu (see quote below).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Referrals of participants from health services (nursing school etc.) provided for participants who had physical abilities to walk or navigate through the garden, and sufficient cognitive abilities that no elopement would occur. Consideration for hydration, heat, humidity and sun protection was undertaken – acknowledgment that some medication makes people more sensitive to these, particularly in hot weather where activity was occurring.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Incorporate Walk for Wellbeing signage along recommended walking paths to enhance visitor experience. Morikami Gardens designer Hoichi Kurisu offers insights into what a garden can provide for visitors including people participating in the stroll for wellbeing. “Immersed in society’s materialism, increasingly boxed into a systematized world, we have become immune to a simpler, more natural way of living and thinking...the development of the Cornell Japanese Gardens at Morikami Park offers rich potential for thought and experience...Strolling through pine forest or bamboo grove, viewing rock formations... pausing to ponder the quiet surface of the lake or shoreline – little by little we are encouraged to lay aside the chaos of the troubled world and gently nurture the capacity within to hear a more harmonious, universal rhythm. We exchange burden, boredom and despair for renewal, inspiration and hope. Or, from the joy we already feel, we discover an even greater capacity for good” (2025).

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.